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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: WESTERN HEMISPHERE: FIDEL CASTRO'S
RESIGNATION; SAO PAULO

11. "Fidel's Resignation"

Liberal, largest national circulation daily Folha de S. Paulo (2/20) editorialized: "The impact of Fidel Castro's resignation is above all a symbolic one. In practical terms, it only makes official the situation that has existed since July 2006, when the dictator began his medical treatment.... Fidel's brother, Ral Castro, and a group of younger and supposedly more pragmatic leaders will have the responsibility of continuing a slow and gradual transition not to democracy, but towards a more open economy tailored according to the Chinese model. In the political area, if Fidel Castro's successors have the opportunity, they will keep intact the authoritarian nature of the regime and the sole party system. Obviously, such strategies are easier to conceive than to execute.... The financial support being provided by Hugo Chavez is an element that helps the continuation plan of the Cuban dictatorship. It is up to the international community to influence the economic opening attempted by Havana to become a political opening too. Washington's role in this change will be the determining factor.... The ideal would be that the USG alleviate the economic sanctions imposed on Havana."

12. "Fidel's Testament"

Center right national circulation daily O Estado de S. Paulo's lead editorial maintained (2/20): "One should not expect major openings in the Castroist regime in the near future.... Even outside the formal structure of power - both in the state and in the party - Fidel will continue to exert strong influence on Cuba's destiny, maybe until his death. Since he replaced his brother, Ral Castro has publicly shown a wish to conduct economic reforms and initiate a diplomatic dialogue with the major Western nations, including the US.... He said he wanted to normalize relations with the European Union and suggested the opening of a direct dialogue with President George Bush. Although he had conditioned all these advances to the maintenance of the Castroist regime - i.e., restrictions fundamental liberties - the reforms did not happen.... The obstacle, as everyone knows, was and will continue to be Fidel."
White